

SUNDANCE

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rewrite it while we are here," says Sanchez-Scott. "This year I came with a play I hated so much — and with characters I love."

When Sanchez-Scott started re-forming her play, she found it helpful to have other writers around. "I've gotten stuck in a scene and they've given me a line from one of their scenes — and somehow it's worked."

"Writing a play gets very lonely," says Wilson. "Playwrights aren't part of any company. We just go from job to job, like the homeless, endlessly hoping."

"Here, you feel like you have a place in the world. There's a family thing to it."

So they work. Every morning after breakfast the actors begin reading scripts, looking at the changes that the writer made the night before. Usually the playwright will be in the room, listening, making a few notes ("She needs some more lines there," says Sanchez-Scott, almost to herself), and taking the director aside for a consultation, before disappearing to write some more.

"It takes a certain kind of actor to read a play in process, says Kranes. "Actors are always pushing to understand the character more fully." They can't at Sundance. At Sundance, the playwright himself may not fully understand the character yet.

Director Larry West says, "David Kranes makes sure the actors know they are *not* there for themselves, they are there for the playwright."

"And I spend an enormous amount of time establishing ground rules for giving feedback to the play-

wright," says Kranes. "We want commentary that empowers the writers to go on. Sometimes when people have a need to feel smart, they make comments at the playwright's expense."

The playwrights get written commentary from Kranes and informal commentary from the actors and director over lunch and dinner. They also receive 15 hours of formal feedback about their plays — by way of comments after readings before the whole group.

Kranes carefully guards the playwrights' process. Before the final reading of Margulies' play, called "Heartbreaker," Kranes reminds the listeners how helpful their comments can be, and adds, "Understanding that plays take long and complicated journeys ... this is where 'Heartbreaker' is today."

At play development labs in other parts of the country, Kranes says, the group that gathers for a reading would include producers and potential buyers. "Most of what goes on in 'play development' is really 'finding product,' an audition so a theater can decide if they'll produce the play," he says.

At Sundance the audience is only writers, actors and directors. And when they make comments afterward these people talk of images, pacing, foreshadowing, the sequence of scenes. They talk as if they know the process of writing. They talk as if they know the play isn't finished yet.

Erin Cressida Wilson says involving actors in her story before it's finished is the best way for her to work. "You have to *hear* it.

"But," she adds, "you have to be able to trust everybody here."

"That other writers and directors and actors can reflect this, that they too want to protect the process and the writers," says Kranes, "is what makes the Sundance Lab unique."

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